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ABSTRACT

Evaluating university residence hall environments at the beginning of the academic year can be valuable for determining environmental strengths and weaknesses and for making appropriate changes to enhance the environment. To evaluate the residence hall environment at Indiana University at Bloomington, a sample of students living in residence halls (N=713) completed questionnaires and identified five items they felt strongly about, either positively or negatively. Statistical analyses revealed that: (1) residence hall personnel were perceived positively; (2) student government was viewed fairly positively; (3) residence hall programs were seen both positively and negatively, with recreational and social programming viewed the most positively, and academic programming (guest speakers, student faculty interaction, cultural programs) viewed somewhat negatively; (4) study conditions were seen as less than optimal; and (5) access to residence hall and university information was viewed positively. The survey instrument is appended. (WAS)

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AN EVALUATION OF LIFE IN THE RESIDENCE HALLS AT INDIANA UNIVERSITY FROM AN ECOSYSTEM PERSPECTIVE: 1982

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The purpose of this report is to discuss an ecosystems environmental assessment project undertaken during Fall, 1982, which evaluated the residence hall environment at Indiana University, Bloomington (IUB). This project was one of a series of evaluations that have been conducted annually on the Bloomington campus, the purpose of which are to evaluate the programs, services and personnel of the residence halls. This summary report outlines a project conducted in all the single, undergraduate student residence centers. Separate information is available upon request for those interested in data generated for single, graduate student centers. Additional reports are available which summarize the responses for each individual undergraduate residence centers.

The ecosystems approach to environmental assessment is different from many paper and pencil assessments. Whereas many such assessments simply solicit student opinions and evaluations concerning a number of research questions, this approach attempts to involve the respondents in reshaping their environment through the use of environment referrents. Environmental referrents are opportunities students have to identify the items they feel most strongly about in the structured questionnaire, indicate why they feel strongly about these items, and recommend actions to enhance them.

Environmental assessment projects have been conducted on the Bloomington campus during the Fall of 1978, 1979, 1980, 1981 and 1982. This paper will report the results of the project conducted in 1982 and compare and contrast the results of the 1982 project with those of the projects conducted in previous years.

It should be noted that while Indiana University is not unique in conducting this kind of project, there are very few colleges and universities throughout the United States where systematic attempts are made to

assess the residence hall environment. This kind of assessment is perceived as a valuable exercise in that it gives the university an opportunity to determine the strengths and weaknesses of the residence hall environment part way through the academic year and make changes where appropriate so that the environment can be enhanced for the balance of the academic year.

Method

Sampling

The sample for this project was drawn on a systematic basis. Each center, with the exception of Collins Living Learning Center, drew a sample of 100 student participants. Due to its smaller size, 50 Collins residents were included in the sample. The students chosen to participate were identified by use of a roster of student residents. The total population of each center (except Collins) was divided by 100. The resulting quotient was the number used to identify students included in the sample. For example, in a center of 1100 students, the resulting quotient was 11. Thus, every 11th student listed on the roster was included in the sample. While this sampling method is not random, it was considered to be reasonably representative, since each living unit had a minimum of one student included in the sample. In nearly all cases, several students from each living unit were included in the sample.

Instrumentation

The instrument used in this project was developed by the authors. It was based on the one that had been employed in previous assessment projects at Indiana University. Representatives from the Halls of Residence Department and the Residence Halls Association were invited to submit items for inclusion in the questionnaire, and they did so. Additionally, the community councils of the various residence centers

were asked to submit not more than five items that addressed specific concerns of individual centers. Many of the centers submitted special questions, which often concerned such matters as programs unique to the centers or library usage. A unique feature of the instrument was the environmental referrent section. This section, which has been noted earlier in this report, gave students the opportunity to go back through the questionnaire and identify not more than five items they felt very strongly about, in a positive or negative sense. They were asked to describe why they felt strongly about the items and then indicate how the issues addressed in the items could be enhanced. This method encourages students to become directly involved in the process of re-designing their environment to better meet their needs. A copy of the questionnaire is included as Appendix A.

Data Collection

The questionnaires were distributed to the potential respondents through the resident assistant staff. The potential respondents were asked to complete the questionnaire and return them to a designated place in the center. All data were collected during the week of November 8-12, 1982. In previous years, the data were collected during October. It was felt this year that a slightly longer living experience in the residence halls would provide students with a better opportunity to evaluate their environment.

Data Analysis

The data analysis plan was supervised by Russ Bumba. Complete reports of the results were prepared using SPSS computer programs which yielded frequency distributions, modes, means, medians and histograms for each center as well as for the residence hall system. Moreover, means,

medians and modes were computed for sub-groups within each center's sample along the following lines: the unit within which the students lived; their class standing; their sex; and whether or not they had lived in their present residence center prior to Fall, 1982. These additional data are especially useful in determining the impact of residential life for specific groups of students, such as sophomore women, freshmen men, students who have lived in the residence hall in previous years, etc.

Results

Of the 950 students included in the sample, 713 completed the questionnaire, for a response rate of 75.05%. Reflecting the general residence hall population, the largest group of respondents by class was freshmen, followed by sophomores, juniors and seniors. A summary of the class standing of the respondents is listed in Table 1.

Table 1

Class Standing of Respondents

Class Standing	Number of Respondents	Percentage of Respondents
Freshmen	362	50.8
Sophomore	213	29.9
Junior	72	10.1
Senior	51	7.2
Graduate	1	.1
No response	14	2.0
Total	713	100.1*

*Does not equal 100 % due to rounding.

More women than men participated in this study, which reflects the fact that more women than men live in the residence halls. Nearly 56% of the participants were women, while the balance were men. The sex of the respondents is reported in Table 2.

Table 2

Sex of Respondents

Sex	Number of Respondents	Percentage of Respondents
Female	398	55.8
Male	299	41.9
No response	16	2.3
Total	713	100.0

The largest percentage of respondents reported that they were living in their present residence hall for the first semester. Over 64% were living in their residence center for the first semester, while the balance, excluding the non-respondents, had lived in the hall previously. A summary of these results are listed in Table 3.

Table 3

First Semester Lived in the Present Residence Center

Response	Number of Respondents	Percentage of Respondents
Yes	457	64.1
No	233	32.7
No response	23	3.2
Total	713	100.0

Means, medians and standard deviations for each individual item are listed in Table 4. Most items elicited a mean score ranging from 4.00 to 6.00. None had a mean score of over 6.00. Four items had a mean score below 4.00. These items included having an opportunity to hear guest speakers, having an opportunity to meet with faculty, looking forward to meal time and being aware of personal development activities in the residence center.

The results of the 1982 study are compared with those from previous years in Table 5. For three items, knowing the rules of the center, being satisfied with the opportunity to hear guest speakers, and knowing how to resolve problems in the center the mean score calculated in 1982 was the highest for the five years the study has been conducted. For none of the items was the mean score for 1982 the lowest over the five year life of this study.

Discussion

This report has been one in a series of studies conducted at IUB designed to assess the environment of the residence halls from an eco-system perspective. Several conclusions can be noted as a result of this study.

Residence hall personnel continue to be perceived very positively by students. Students seem to appreciate the efforts of the custodial people, office staff, food service workers and resident assistants. The custodial staff and resident assistants, in particular, were evaluated very positively by the students, receiving mean scores of 5.72 and 5.66 for their efforts. What is especially noteworthy is that only 81 students responded negatively toward the work of the custodians, while just 42 students indicated a negative response toward the availability of their RA's.

Student government received reasonably positive marks from the student constituency. Two items dealt with student government opportunities and services, and in each case the student response was positive, including 4.36 for the item concerning student government responding adequately to needs expressed in the center and 4.77 for the item concerned with opportunities for student involvement in leadership positions.

Programs offered in the centers received a wide range of responses from students. As has been the case in previous years, recreational programming seems to be perceived the most positively by undergraduates, followed by social programming at both the unit and center level. More academically-oriented programming, such as student-faculty interaction, guest speakers, cultural programs and personal development programs, was perceived less positively, and in the case of personal development programs, student-faculty interaction and guest speakers, the mean responses were approximately 3.90 which indicated a somewhat negative response toward the availability of such programs.

Two items addressed the academic environment in the residential centers. A mean score of 4.45 was developed for the item addressing the ability students have to study in their rooms when they wish. The other item dealing with study conditions, having an opportunity to study in alternative areas of the center, earned a mean score of 5.98. Collectively, these items probably indicate that students can find a place to study when they wish to do so, but that study conditions are not optimal.

Items dealing with the information students have about the center and the university have reflected a generally positive student response. Students reported that they know the rules and regulations of the residential centers and the printed information provided to them in the centers appears to get the intended message across.

One variable in this year's process may have contributed to different student perceptions from previous years. The data were collected in early November as compared with early to mid-October in previous years. By delaying the data collection it is entirely possible that such factors as student fatigue, the results of mid-term examinations, or general disenchantment with the university environment after having lived in the halls for over two months without a break.

What is most striking about this year's assessment is that most of the mean scores fall in the middle between the high and low scores of previous years. Therefore, the most obvious conclusion one could draw from the data is that they reveal nothing remarkable. Students seemed to be fairly satisfied with residence personnel and services, although they indicated slight dissatisfaction with some program areas. Clearly, an agenda can be drawn for Spring, 1983, from this report, which would focus on several specific program areas. Since this report represents an aggregate for the residence hall system, it cannot be used to identify specific problems in the individual centers. That task belongs to the residence hall staff and student leaders in each center as they strive to improve the quality of life in the residence centers.

Table 4

Item by Item Responses

	Median	Mean	Standard Deviation
1. The "Ins and Outs," distributed at registration, provides an adequate description of services, resources and regulations to students on campus.	5.202	5.133	1.206
2. There are adequate opportunities for social activities in my living unit (house, floor).	5.199	4.963	1.500
3. I am satisfied with the opportunities I have to hear guest speakers in my center.	4.000	3.976	1.543
4. The Halls of Residence staff are responsive to my needs concerning physical facilities.	4.816	4.740	1.522
5. I am able to study in my room when I wish to.	4.855	4.454	1.920
6. My resident assistant is available to meet my needs.	5.903	5.660	1.288
7. The Halls of Residence Office staff are responsive and helpful in providing main desk services.	5.440	5.205	1.404
8. Student government in my residence center offers me opportunities to participate in leadership positions.	4.643	4.778	1.433
9. I am satisfied with the opportunities I have to meet with faculty members in my residence center (outside of class).	3.956	3.915	1.488
10. My student government responds adequately to the needs expressed by residents of this center.	4.293	4.369	1.312
11. I have adequate opportunities to participate in recreational activities in my residence center.	5.545	5.356	1.329
12. I think my study skills are adequate.	5.513	5.243	1.391
13. I know the rules of my residence center.	5.852	5.652	1.230

Table 4 Con'd.

Item by Item Responses

	Median	Mean	Standard Deviation
14. There are adequate opportunities for cultural events in my center, i.e., music, arts, crafts.	4.058	4.083	1.528
15. I have an opportunity to talk with someone in my center about personal concerns, such as homesickness, relationships, or academics.	4.897	4.828	1.617
16. There are adequate opportunities for social activities in my center.	5.223	5.030	1.455
17. The Key (Guide to Graduate Living in Eigenmann Center) does a good job of describing residence hall living at Indiana University.	4.495	4.746	1.245
18. The custodian in my living unit keeps the area clean.	6.242	5.722	1.630
19. I have an opportunity to study in alternative areas of the residence center, such as libraries or study halls.	6.244	5.988	1.163
20. I have received adequate printed information which describes the services and resources available to students in my center.	5.334	5.107	1.420
21. I feel safe and secure in my residence center.	5.717	5.328	1.542
22. The counter servers in my dining hall are helpful and courteous.	5.058	4.808	1.715
23. I look forward to meal time in my dining hall.	3.191	3.25	1.822
24. When I have a problem in my center, I am aware of the person(s) to contact to remedy the situation.	5.018	4.903	1.483
25. I am in favor of a policy allowing residents to enter the dining hall only once per meal. This would help prevent non-residents from entry and aid in maintaining low board rates. This policy would not rule out second servings for residents or guests.	4.484	4.404	2.074

Table 4 Con'd.

Item by Item Responses

		Median	Mean	Standard Deviation
26.	I am aware of personal development activities such as assertiveness and leadership workshops being offered in my center.	3.952	3.938	1.651
27.	The food manager in my dining hall is helpful in assisting with exchange dinners, special diets, sick trays or food and equipment for floor functions.	4.375	4.620	1.355
28.	I like living in my residence center.	5.620	5.334	1.452
29.	University rules and regulations are enforced consistently in my center.	5.175	5.009	1.489
30.	My center's student government officers are accessible and responsive to problems and questions I have about the residence halls system.	4.333	4.478	1.364

Table 5

Mean Scores for the 1978, 1979, 1980, 1981 and 1982 Surveys

	$\bar{X}$ Fall 1978	$\bar{X}$ Fall 1979	$\bar{X}$ Fall 1980	$\bar{X}$ Fall 1981	$\bar{X}$ Fall 1982
1. The "Ins and Outs," distributed at registration, provides an adequate description of services and resources to students on campus.	*	5.03	5.04	5.17	5.13
2. There are adequate opportunities for social activities in my living unit (house, floor, hall).	4.92	5.16	5.24	5.21	4.96
3. Interesting, informative guest speakers make presentations in my center.	2.30	3.04	3.22	3.71	3.97
4. The Halls of Residence staff are responsive to my needs concerning physical facilities.	4.59	4.52	4.80	4.85	4.74
5. The Halls of Residence Office staff are responsive and helpful in providing main desk services.	6.02	5.26	5.31	5.15	5.20
6. I am able to study in my room when I wish to.	4.20	4.46	4.53	4.61	4.45
7. The resident assistants (resident fellows in Collins) in my center are available to meet my needs.	5.19	5.62	5.53	5.80	5.66
8. I have adequate opportunities to participate in recreational programs offered through my residence center.	5.33	5.66	5.55	5.40	5.35
9. Student government in my residence center offers me opportunities to participate in leadership positions.	4.32	5.08	4.97	4.87	4.77

Table 5 Con'd.

Mean Scores for the 1978, 1979, 1980, 1981 and 1982 Surveys

		$\bar{X}$ Fall 1978	$\bar{X}$ Fall 1979	$\bar{X}$ Fall 1980	$\bar{X}$ Fall 1981	$\bar{X}$ Fall 1982
10.	I am satisfied with the opportunities I have to meet with faculty members in my residence center.	3.41	3.90	3.91	4.09	3.91
11.	I know the rules of my residence center.	5.19	5.56	5.36	5.42	5.65
12.	The opportunity for cultural events in my center, i.e., concerts, arts and crafts, meets my needs.	3.68	3.98	4.24	4.23	4.08
13.	I have an opportunity to talk with someone in my center about personal problems, such as home-sickness, relationships, or academics.	4.40	4.87	4.98	4.95	4.82
14.	I have an opportunity to study in alternative areas of the residence center, such as libraries or study halls.	*	5.92	5.99	5.95	5.98
15.	There are adequate opportunities for social activities in my center.	4.81	5.11	5.09	5.09	5.03
16.	The Key does a good job of describing residence hall living at Indiana University.	4.68	4.96	4.66	4.37	4.74
17.	The custodian in my living unit keeps the area clean.	5.51	5.87	5.74	5.79	5.72
18.	I have received adequate printed information which describes the services and resources available to students in my center.	4.71	5.12	4.93	5.28	5.10

Table 5 Con'd.

Mean Scores for the 1978, 1979, 1980, 1981 and 1982 Surveys

		$\bar{X}$ Fall 1978	$\bar{X}$ Fall 1979	$\bar{X}$ Fall 1980	$\bar{X}$ Fall 1981	$\bar{X}$ Fall 1982
19.	I feel safe and secure in my residence center.	5.30	5.33	5.27	5.58	5.32
20.	I am in favor of a policy allowing residents to enter the dining hall only once per meal. This helps prevent non-residents from causing increased food costs which are reflected in the board rate. This does not rule out second servings for residents or paying guests.	4.36	4.77	4.13	4.55	4.40
21.	I am aware of personal development activities such as assertiveness and leadership workshops being offered in my center.	*	3.76	3.58	3.93	3.93
22.	When I have a problem in my center I am aware of the procedures to follow to remedy the situation.	*	4.54	4.56	4.63	4.90

* Did not appear in the 1978 questionnaire
1 = Very Strongly Disagree
7 = Very Strongly Agree

APPENDIX A:
THE INSTRUMENT

Indiana University

November 8, 1982

Dear Resident Student,

One of the objectives we have is to make living in the residence halls be a rewarding experience for students. Students should have a regular opportunity to provide information to organizations such as the Community Councils and the staff assigned to the various centers on how they perceive life in the center.

With that in mind, you have been selected as one of approximately 10% of the residential population to complete the attached questionnaire. It should not take more than 20 minutes to do so. The information you provide will be extremely useful in attempting to modify the environment in which you live.

We want to assure you that all responses will be anonymous. Let us thank you in advance for your cooperation.

Sincerely yours,

Leland R. Ratliff

Leland Ratliff, Director
Halls of Residence

Kevin R. Robling

Kevin Robling, President
Residence Halls Association

John H. Schuh

John H. Schuh, Director
Department of Residence Life

Please answer the following three questions by placing an X in the blank space that represents the best answer to the question, and then go on to the next page:

Please indicate your class standing:
Freshman _____
Sophomore _____
Junior _____
Senior _____
Graduate _____

Please indicate your sex:
Female _____
Male _____

Is this the first semester you have lived in your present residence center?

Yes _____
No _____

Please indicate your living unit: Center _____ Unit _____

PART I

Listed below are a series of statements. Please read them and on the continuum to the right of each statement, indicate the degree to which you agree or disagree with it by placing an X in the appropriate blank.

The following definitions of terms may be useful to you:

Resident Assistant (Resident Fellow in LLC): This person is an upperclass or graduate student who is assigned to a floor or house and is responsible for interpersonal, social, and academic experiences of students.

Residence Life Staff: Includes Resident Assistants (Resident Fellows) and Residence Life Coordinators.

Halls of Residence Staff: Includes the Housing Manager, maintenance and custodial personnel, and clerical staff.

	(7) Very Strongly Agree			(4) Neutral			(1) Very Strongly Disagree
1. The "Ins and Outs," distributed at registration, provides an adequate description of services, resources and regulations to students on campus.	___/	___/	___/	____/	___/	___/	___/
2. There are adequate opportunities for social activities in my living unit (house, floor).	___/	___/	___/	____/	___/	___/	___/
3. I am satisfied with the opportunities I have to hear guest speakers in my center.	___/	___/	___/	____/	___/	___/	___/
4. The Halls of Residence staff are responsive to my needs concerning physical facilities.	___/	___/	___/	____/	___/	___/	___/
5. I am able to study in my room when I wish to.	___/	___/	___/	____/	___/	___/	___/
6. My resident assistant is available to meet my needs.	___/	___/	___/	____/	___/	___/	___/
7. The Halls of Residence Office staff are responsive and helpful in providing main desk services.	___/	___/	___/	____/	___/	___/	___/
8. Student government in my residence center offers me opportunities to participate in leadership positions.	___/	___/	___/	____/	___/	___/	___/
9. I am satisfied with the opportunities I have to meet with faculty members in my residence center (outside of class).	___/	___/	___/	____/	___/	___/	___/

	(7) Very Strongly Agree			(4) Neutral			(1) Very Strongly Disagree
10. My student government responds adequately to the needs expressed by residents of this center.	___/	___/	___/	___/	___/	___/	___/
11. I have adequate opportunities to participate in recreational activities in my residence center.	___/	___/	___/	___/	___/	___/	___/
12. I think my study skills are adequate.	___/	___/	___/	___/	___/	___/	___/
13. I know the rules of my residence center.	___/	___/	___/	___/	___/	___/	___/
14. There are adequate opportunities for cultural events in my center, i.e., music, arts, crafts.	___/	___/	___/	___/	___/	___/	___/
15. I have an opportunity to talk with someone in my center about personal concerns, such as homesickness, relationships, or academics.	___/	___/	___/	___/	___/	___/	___/
16. There are adequate opportunities for social activities in my center.	___/	___/	___/	___/	___/	___/	___/
17. The Key (Guide to Graduate Living in Eigenmann Center) does a good job of describing residence hall living at Indiana University.	___/	___/	___/	___/	___/	___/	___/
18. The custodian in my living unit keeps the area clean.	___/	___/	___/	___/	___/	___/	___/
19. I have an opportunity to study in alternative areas of the residence center, such as libraries or study halls.	___/	___/	___/	___/	___/	___/	___/
20. I have received adequate printed information which describes the services and resources available to students in my center.	___/	___/	___/	___/	___/	___/	___/
21. I feel safe and secure in my residence center.	___/	___/	___/	___/	___/	___/	___/
22. The counter servers in my dining hall are helpful and courteous.	___/	___/	___/	___/	___/	___/	___/
23. I look forward to meal time in my dining hall.	___/	___/	___/	___/	___/	___/	___/
24. When I have a problem in my center, I am aware of the person(s) to contact to remedy the situation.	___/	___/	___/	___/	___/	___/	___/

25. **I am in favor of a policy allowing residents to enter the dining hall** only once per meal. This would help prevent non-residents from entry and aid in maintaining low board rates. This policy would not rule out second servings for residents or guests. ___/ ___/ ___/ ____/ ___/ ___/ ___/

26. I am aware of personal development activities such as assertiveness and leadership workshops being offered in my center. ___/ ___/ ___/ ____/ ___/ ___/ ___/

27. The food manager in my dining hall is helpful in assisting with exchange dinners, special diets, sick trays or food and equipment for floor functions. ___/ ___/ ___/ ____/ ___/ ___/ ___/

28. I like living in my residence center. ___/ ___/ ___/ ____/ ___/ ___/ ___/

29. University rules and regulations are enforced consistently in my center. ___/ ___/ ___/ ____/ ___/ ___/ ___/

30. My center's student government officers are accessible and responsive to problems and questions I have about the residence halls system. ___/ ___/ ___/ ____/ ___/ ___/ ___/

PART II

Now that you have completed Part I, go back through the items and identify not more than five items that you feel very strongly about, in either a positive or negative sense. Write the number of those items in the blocks provided below. Then, next to the item number, write why you feel strongly about the item, and what you would recommend to improve the situation.

ITEM NUMBER	WHY DO YOU FEEL STRONGLY ABOUT THE ITEM	WHAT CAN BE DONE TO IMPROVE THE SITUATION

Thank you for your help with this project.